On a level playing field
Fair play and the common good
To desire the common good and strive towards it is a requirement of justice and charity.

Pope Benedict XVI, Caritas in Veritate #7, 2009

FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE WEEK 2011
11 TO 17 SEPTEMBER

Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand 2011
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3  Employment and Justice
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5  The Digital Divide: Poverty and Wealth in the Information Age
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“Unable to avoid suffering, none of us should have to meet it alone.”

New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference:
*A shoreless ocean: a pastoral reflection on suffering*, 2010

The reality of these words came home to all New Zealanders this year on February 22, when Christchurch experienced its most devastating earthquake in a series that have shaken lives, homes and nerves for months. In face of the loss of life, homes, jobs and community structures, people have reached out to one another in compassion, companionship and solidarity.

February 22 was also a day in which significant welfare reforms were proposed by the government Welfare Working Group. Unfortunately that has resulted in a different kind of outpouring – of resentment, blame and even hatred of many of our most vulnerable citizens, many of whom rely on benefits as a consequence of personal, rather than national, tragedy.

Suffering and poverty can come in unattractive packages. Sometimes we want to distance ourselves but the face of Christ is to be seen in the ‘least’ of our brothers and sisters. Justice and charity are not only for when times are good, but for all times of life.

Pope Benedict calls us back to our deep Scriptural and Catholic social teaching traditions when he asks us to strive for the common good, which is the good of *all of us*, the good which includes but also reaches beyond our individual needs and desires to the good of all the people, families and groups that make up our society.

An excessive emphasis on individual self-sufficiency leads to resenting our inter-dependency, and too easily judges that when people sometimes have to depend on others – whether through disability, illness, unemployment – they are unworthy or undeserving of our collective support.
In contrast, Pope Benedict sees that allowing ourselves to think we are self-sufficient is a way of closing in on ourselves, and closing ourselves off from God’s love which wants to flow through us to others. Sharing God’s love involves sharing the resources which God intends for all.

Traditional Māori wisdom gives us this explanation of the same vision: *Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini: my strength is not mine alone, but that of the many.* Social Justice Week 2011 is a time to consider how we can deepen our understanding of ourselves as a human family, sharing the sorrows, joys and griefs of life together.

✠ John Dew
Archbishop of Wellington
President, NZCBC

✠ Patrick Dunn
Bishop of Auckland
Secretary, NZCBC

✠ Denis Browne
Bishop of Hamilton

✠ Colin Campbell
Bishop of Dunedin

✠ Peter Cullinane
Bishop of Palmerston North

✠ Barry Jones
Bishop of Christchurch

✠ Charles Drennan
Coadjutor Bishop of Palmerston North
On a level playing field: Introduction

Luke’s Gospel presents to us the parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus. The rich man personifies the wicked use of riches by those who spend them on uncontrolled and selfish luxuries, thinking solely of satisfying themselves without caring at all for the beggar at their door. The poor man, on the contrary, represents the person whom God alone cares for... God does not forget those who are forgotten by all; those who are worthless in human eyes are precious in the Lord’s.

Pope Benedict XVI: Angelus, 30 Sept 2007

The Gospel of Luke tells us Christ’s story of Lazarus and the rich man, an illustration of the gap between the lives of the rich and the lives of the poor. The rich man ‘feasted magnificently’, while the poor man Lazarus lay at his gate and longed for the scraps that fell from the rich man’s table.

Many New Zealanders are aware of the immense gulf between the way people live in wealthy countries such as our own, and the extreme poverty suffered by millions throughout the developing world. However, it is sometimes a greater challenge to see and respond to the poverty ‘at the gate’. Sometimes what is closest to us is dulled by familiarity and routine.

The Gospel story does not tell us why the rich man ignored Lazarus – only that he did. Maybe he thought Lazarus was lazy, or that he thought Lazarus had made ‘poor choices’, or that he thought giving Lazarus food scraps would encourage a ‘dependency mentality’. There are many excuses we make for ignoring the needs of the poor. However, the rich man is ultimately held to account for his behaviour towards Lazarus.

As New Zealanders we pride ourselves on giving everyone a ‘fair go’. In a country that takes satisfaction in sporting achievements, we may apply a sporting metaphor to illustrate our vision of a fair society – ‘a level playing field’. Unfortunately, one of the areas in which New Zealand has been a ‘world leader’ recently has been in the growth of inequality. Many New Zealanders do not experience our society as a fair one. Social Justice Week 2011 blows the whistle on issues of fairness and inequality in our midst.
Fair play

We ask the members of our Churches: ‘Do you experience New Zealand society as a fair one, and does your way of life contribute to the development of a just society?’

New Zealand Church Leaders, Social Justice Statement, 1993

New Zealanders value fair play. We accept that a ‘good game’ requires good teamwork, good sportsmanship and playing by the rules. We get angry when the odds are stacked against one side, or when people are not given a sporting chance.

While looking for fairness on the sports field we still recognise that some people are more talented than others, that some have trained harder or longer, and some have better tactics and teamwork. We are able to accept all these things, and to cheer for the winners and commiserate with the losers at the end of a match.

However, when we agree to take part in – or even to watch – a sports game or event, we expect there will be rules agreed on by competitors and officials beforehand, and that there will be referees who enforce those rules. We expect and look for this – so that all who enter a race or a match will have an equal chance of success.

We look for teams that are reasonably evenly matched – for example, the All Blacks versus New Zealand secondary schools isn’t likely to be regarded as very ‘sporting’. We expect that the conditions of the sports grounds will also allow for an equal chance of success – for example, that both sides have an equal time of playing ‘into the wind’. And we expect that the field, track or court will give all competitors the
same opportunity – for example, that a football game won’t see one side kicking the ball uphill, while the other side kicks it downhill.

We call such measures to ensure fairness ‘having a level playing field’. And we use this sporting metaphor as well when we discuss issues or fairness and equality in our wider society.

What makes a ‘fair society’? New Zealand’s Church leaders described it in 1993 like this:

Social Justice is:
• fairness in our dealings with other people;
• fairness in the way responsibilities are shared;
• fairness in the distribution of income, wealth and power in our society;
• fairness in the social, economic and political structures we have created;
• fairness in the operation of those structures so that they enable all citizens to be active and productive participants in the life of society.

New Zealand Church Leaders: Social Justice statement, 1993

We are a competitive society. We are proud to be on the winning side of sports tournaments and competitions. But we should not take pride in our winning place as a ‘world leader’ in inequality.

For those on the losing side of that game, it often feels as if New Zealand is far from being a level playing field. Many people living in poverty feel that the rules themselves are unfair, judged by referees biased by a hostile crowd, in an environment where they cannot possibly succeed, let alone win.

Question: Do I experience New Zealand as a ‘level playing field’? Do I know people who experience this differently to me?
Blowing the whistle on inequality

We are therefore faced with a serious problem of unequal distribution of the means of subsistence originally meant for everybody, and thus also an unequal distribution of the benefits deriving from them. And this happens not through the fault of the needy people.

Pope John Paul II: *Solicitudo Rei Socialis* #9, 1987

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New Zealand wealth is unevenly distributed. The wealthiest 10 percent of the population hold over 50 percent of total wealth while the bottom half of the population holding 5.2 percent (*Statistics New Zealand Survey of Family, Income and Employment, 2004*).

Between 1984 and 1998, New Zealand had the highest growth in income inequality in the OECD. While this levelled a little after 2004, these inequalities have become entrenched and are likely to increase as a result of the 2009 economic crisis, the 2010 tax cuts, the Christchurch earthquakes and recent public policy decisions.

During the New Zealand experience of the 1980s and 1990s, the income of 80 percent of New Zealanders fell while only the top 20 percent of households had
an increase in income. This shows that a growing gap between the richest and poorest members of society does not just affect the extremes. Negative impacts were felt across 80 percent of incomes.

Both New Zealand and international public health research indicate that inequality has consequences for everyone in a society. This research includes the United Kingdom’s Marmot report on health inequalities, and Wilkinson and Pickett’s *The Spirit Level*. Wilkerson and Picket argue that wealthy societies with very wide income inequalities have worse social outcomes than less wealthy societies with smaller inequalities.
Former New Zealand Treasury head John Whitehouse agrees with Wilkinson and Pickett’s overall conclusion. In a speech in May 2011 he said that the growth in inequality is a concern for the New Zealand economy. He said in highly unequal societies, it is hard to maintain economic performance.

New Zealand’s inequalities are seen in many areas of economic and social wellbeing. Different outcomes for different groups facing similar circumstances are one way to look at whether our society is fair or unfair.

For example, many New Zealanders have lost jobs or found it hard to find work since the 2009 economic crisis. This crisis was primarily due to the actions of financial institutions far from New Zealand shores, rather than the behaviour or motivations of New Zealand employers or workers. However, unemployment has not affected people equally across New Zealand society. Young people have experienced this more than older workers, and Māori and Pacific more than European/Pākehā groups:

**Unemployment changes 2009–2011**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2011</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall unemployment</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Māori unemployment</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth unemployment</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Māori youth unemployment</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services outlines many other indicators of inequality in their *Whakatata Mai – Closer Together* inequality project. They note that in comparison to similar countries, New Zealand ranks particularly poorly in relative rates of imprisonment, teenage births, infant mortality, mental illness and life expectancy. We do, however, rate above average for levels of trust, homicide and literacy.

**Question:** Do I experience New Zealand society as equal or unequal? Does this concern me?
The gap between rich and poor: a perspective from Catholic social teaching

While the poor of the world continue knocking on the doors of the rich, the world of affluence runs the risk of no longer hearing those knocks, on account of a conscience that can no longer distinguish what is human.

Pope Benedict XVI: *Caritas in Veritate* #75, 2009

Our Biblical tradition is rich with images of compassion for the poor, and outrage at unfair treatment. Old Testament prophets such as Amos railed against the overconsumption of the rich in the face of the suffering of the poor. Jesus showed through his actions as much as his teaching that he did not recognise gulfs between people. He proclaimed ‘good news to the poor’, and reached out to people regarded as outcasts – such as tax collectors and prostitutes.

Modern Catholic social teaching was born out of Pope Leo XIII’s deep concern at the growing gap between rich and poor which he saw during the European Industrial Revolution. His 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* applies the Catholic Church’s moral principles to the changing social situation in which he witnessed ‘the enormous fortunes of some individuals and the utter poverty of the masses’ (*Rerum Novarum* #1).

His concern was not only for the material poverty experienced by the poor, but also for their relative...
powerlessness. While recognising that all people have rights, he said the poor have a claim to special consideration because ‘the rich have many ways of shielding themselves, and stand less in need of help from the State, whereas the mass of the poor have no resources of their own to fall back on, and must chiefly depend upon the assistance of the State’. (*Rerum Novarum #37*)

Pope Leo did not envisage an absolutely equal society, saying ‘it is impossible to reduce civil society to one dead level’ as differences naturally exist among people. But he wished to draw rich and poor closer to each other, by reminding each of their duties to the other. (*Rerum Novarum #18-19*).

Since *Rerum Novarum*, the Church has supported neither an individualistic response, where people are left to the mercy of the strongest or to market forces; nor a forced collectivism, in which the State forcibly removes the property rights of others. People have the *right* to private property, but also the *duty* to use their wealth and property for the good of all.

Forty years after *Rerum Novarum*, in the midst of the Great Depression in 1931, Pope Pius XI restated the Church’s concern that society had become divided into classes, one of which ‘enjoyed all the advantages’ while the other was ‘oppressed by wretched poverty’. (*Quadragesimo Anno #3*)

Echoing words of modern economic debates about whether care for the poorest members of society is the responsibility of the community sector and churches or the State, he expressed concern about those who thought their wealth was the result of ‘inevitable economic laws’ and wanted the care of supporting the poor ‘committed to charity alone’. (*Quadragesimo Anno #4*).

He believed that bringing ‘private ownership into harmony with the needs of the common good’ was not an act of hostility against the rich, but was rather doing them a ‘friendly service’.

In very similar circumstances to those in which Pope Pius XI spoke – the aftermath of a financial crisis brought about in part by unethical financial transactions – Pope Benedict XVI in his most recent encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* continued this tradition. He spoke out against the growth in inequalities both internationally and within countries themselves.
He said that growth in inequality leads to the erosion of relationships of trust and respect. It is important that economic choices ‘do not cause disparities in wealth to increase in an excessive and morally unacceptable manner’. (Caritas in Veritate #32)

In applying this Catholic tradition and teaching within our own society, New Zealand’s Catholic Bishops have continued to teach that the Church is concerned with people’s material, as well as spiritual, wellbeing.

During the 1980s and 1990s, New Zealand’s Catholic Bishops spoke out against the growth in inequality, paying particular attention to the impact of economic and social policies on the poorest members of society.

In 2008, when New Zealand was beginning to experience the first symptoms of the worldwide economic crisis, they commented that God does not create human beings exactly the same; and that the diversity of talent, culture and ethnicities is intended by God. They noted that voluntary poverty, in which people free themselves from attachment to material possessions, can be positive, but that poverty becomes an evil when it is forced on people through oppression or disadvantage. (NZCBC: Poverty in an affluent society, 2008)

**Question:** What do I find most challenging in Catholic social teaching on inequality, poverty and relationships between rich and poor?
Teamwork

Caritas Internationalis is called to work in converting people’s hearts in openness towards all our brothers and sisters, so that everyone, in full respect for his or her freedom and in the full acceptance of his or her personal responsibilities, may always and everywhere act for the common good, generously giving the best of himself or herself in the service of his or her brothers and sisters, particularly those in greatest need.

Pope Benedict XVI: *Address to Caritas Internationalis General Assembly*, 2011

Many sports are made up of teams – and good teamwork is important to success. Many New Zealand sports coaches tell their teams: ‘I want a star team, not a team of stars’. Many New Zealanders know from personal experience of being part of a sports team that a team is more than the sum of its individual members.

Teamwork is about looking out not just for what is good for me, or what is good for you, but what is good for us. It is about looking out for the good of each other. In Catholic terms, talking about teamwork is talking about the common good.
Pope Benedict explains the common good as being a good that is linked to living in society. ‘It is the good of ‘all of us’, made up of individuals, families and intermediate groups who together constitute society. He says we do not seek the common good purely for its own sake but for the sake of all the people who make up and belong to our social communities. ‘The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbours, the more effectively we love them.’ (Caritas in Veritate #7)

Sometimes our society reduces us to roles in a market economy – as consumers, customers, clients, service users. In response, Pope Benedict calls us to remember that we are a human family, brothers and sisters.

A Catholic approach to morality is always social and relational. When we think about the common good, we are thinking about ourselves in relation to each other: as members of whānau, families, communities, parishes, iwi, neighbourhoods.

This means that when we are thinking about the consequences of public policies and political decisions, we are asked not just to think about what is best for me, or for my family. We are called to consider what will be best for us all as a community, particularly taking into account the poorest and most vulnerable, even if they are not the majority or do not have a lot of political power.

**Question:** Do I think of all New Zealanders as my brothers and sisters? Who do I have a tendency to forget are members of my human family?
Equality of opportunity or equality of outcome?

Situations of underdevelopment ... are not due to chance or historical necessity, but are attributable to human responsibility.

Pope Benedict XVI: Caritas in Veritate #17, 2009

Some people wish to redefine ‘fairness’ and ‘social justice’ as meaning giving people an equal chance, rather than our more traditional New Zealand attitude of looking out to ensure that everyone has what they need to participate in society. They would say that equality is ensuring that everyone has an equal chance to ‘start the race’.

Popular ways in which we might hear this expressed could be: ‘Anyone can become an All Black’ or ‘Anyone can become Prime Minister’. It is true that, unlike some other parts of the world, there are no legal impediments to any New Zealand citizen achieving at this level. But that does not mean that every New Zealand child does in fact have an equal chance to grow up to be an All Black.

An equal opportunity is an important aspect of a fair society. But equal outcomes
are also important. Considering only whether a person has an equal ‘opportunity’ to participate can overlook the various forms of disadvantage that affect different people in society quite differently.

New Zealand has seen an outpouring of compassion and support for the victims of the Christchurch earthquakes. We all understand that some people will recover more quickly from these than others.

People who have lost family members or who have received serious injuries may take a long time, and a lot of care and support, before life will start to feel ‘normal’ again. Some people will have a temporary period out of work, while others may find that their business or employment no longer has a future. Some people may require only simple repairs to their homes, while others are facing major relocation.

Similarly, some members of our society face temporary periods of difficulty while others are living with long-term, sustained disadvantage. Therefore, some members of our society may need greater help to attain the same level of outcome. A ‘level playing field’ does not exclude competition, but it is more than about ensuring that the game is not played on a hill. Rules, referees and playing conventions are all needed to ensure a ‘fair go’.

The Catholic Church recognises that distributive justice is an essential part of social justice. Legal justice ensures that everyone is under the same rules, and commutative justice looks to see that we are fair in our exchanges and our dealings with each other. But distributive justice recognises that the fruits of our ‘success’ – such as wealth – are not ours alone to decide what to do with. Distributive justice does not require identical treatment or outcomes. But it does recognise other people have a valid claim to a share of the goods of the earth, since everything we have is a result of God’s gifts to us.

**Question:** Do I regard what I own as being for the common good of others?
Competition and cooperation

We are witnessing the invasion of many areas of human activity by a radical individualism: economic life, excessive competition, competition in all fields of human activity, disregard of the marginalised

Pontifical Council for the Family, 2002

Competition can be a positive motivator for many good human qualities. When a person, or team, or community uses competition as a way of improving and motivating their own improvement and achievement, it is a worthy goal.

Pope John Paul II told a group of athletes in 1982 that athletic competition draws out of people some of their ‘noblest qualities and talents’, while learning the secrets – weaknesses and strengths – of their own bodies. Through exercise and effort people develop the power of concentration and the habit of discipline.

He said: ‘These qualities and talents are important not only for sporting events, but in other areas of life as well. For the mature person is one who knows his own strengths and weaknesses, and who through discipline and persevering effort, can place these gifts at the service of others for the building up of society.’ (Address to a group of athletes, 1982)

However, competition can be less worthy when it is aimed at increasing the power or wealth of an individual or group at the expense of another. While market competition can provide an effective economic process, it also often creates winners and losers, with effects far beyond those involved in any particular exchange. The New Zealand Catholic Bishops commented on this in their 1997 statement Te Kahu-o-te-ora: A consistent ethic of life:
‘The modern consumer culture, itself imbued with an ethos of competition, can do violence to the weak, the vulnerable, the feeble, the poor, and the powerless, while rewarding the strong, the beautiful, the powerful and the rich.... The future is in our hands to walk towards life rather than death, to develop and enhance the fabric of life for all co-operatively rather than competitively.’

Competition is at its best when it assists people to strive to achieve their best, but not when success requires another person’s failure. Pope Benedict cautions that the market is not, and must not become, ‘the place where the strong subdue the weak’ (Caritas in Veritate #36).

Competition in sport, as well as in the economy, often requires an environment in which teamwork and cooperation is required, even between competitors. ‘Perfect competition’ in economic terms, is one in which no one buyer or seller can dominate the market. Even the market operates best in a climate of mutual trust, which cannot itself be built by market forces alone.

Pope Benedict says that economic competition includes a temptation to sacrifice essential services for the good of all. He warns that setting up fiscal regimes favourable to businesses and deregulating the labour market has led to a ‘downsizing of social security systems as the price to be paid for seeking greater competitive advantage in the global market’. He notes that this competition can also lead to cuts in social spending which may ‘leave citizens powerless in the face of old and new risks’. (Caritas in Veritate #25)

Question: When does being competitive help me to achieve my best? When does it come at someone else’s cost?
Winners and losers

Many people today would claim that they owe nothing to anyone, except to themselves...

Pope Benedict XVI: *Caritas in Veritate* #43, 2009

If there is a winner, doesn’t there have to be a loser? Is ‘win-win’ ever possible?

Sometimes those concerned about people who feel excluded or rejected by our society are accused of playing the ‘politics of envy’ or of wishing to ‘knock down tall poppies’.

Every parent of a child in a sports team knows that disappointment at losing a fair game is an inevitable part of life, as is helping children to learn from these experiences and set new goals.

However, we also know that if children keep on losing because there are no rules, or the rules are not enforced, or there is no hope of winning, people won’t bother to play. If the referee doesn’t make fair calls, or if the odds are stacked against one side, people will withdraw from the game.
Most New Zealanders living in poverty do strive to improve their situations. For example, the numbers of people living on benefits rises and falls with the employment opportunities available in our economy. However, many of us may know people who have ‘given up on the game’ – people who feel it’s impossible for them to succeed in our society.

Some feel that punishing the ‘losers’ in our society – for example through punitive welfare or criminal justice policies – is what is required. A Catholic approach is rather one of incentives and empowerment, and of forgiveness and second chances, rather than a punishing approach. God is the ultimate referee who will decide the rightness and wrongness of people’s actions, but all of us need to take personal responsibility for inviting and encouraging the most discouraged people back into the game. As Pope Benedict says: ‘Solidarity is first and foremost a sense of responsibility on the part of everyone with regard to everyone.’ (Caritas in Veritate #38)

We also need to recognise that what we might like to think of as our own personal achievements are often the outcome of other people’s determination to give us a fair go. For example, many ‘successful’ people in New Zealand politics, business and public life have achieved because of the social security system built up by previous generations in the form of public education, healthcare, housing and income security.

The popular myth of the ‘self-made’ man or woman who ‘pulled themselves up by their bootstraps’ usually overlooks the contribution and context of the wider society that enabled them to achieve their goals. Pope Benedict cautions: ‘A person’s development is compromised, if he claims to be solely responsible for producing what he becomes.’ (Caritas in Veritate #68)

**Question:** Do I recognise and value the contribution other people and wider society have made to assist me become the person I am or want to be?
Inclusion and exclusion

One of the deepest forms of poverty a person can experience is isolation.

Pope Benedict XVI: Caritas in Veritate #53, 2009

Have you ever seen a child standing at the edge of a game, longing to be asked to join in? Or suffered with those waiting to be selected for a team? Participation is as essential to the common good as it is to the sports field. Every team coach, team manager and referee knows that a person must join in before they are going to learn the skills and rules of a game.

Many of the poorest New Zealanders by necessity have to live in ways that reduce their participation in society. Families on the lowest incomes often have to make choices between essentials that mean that children’s participation in sport and cultural activities are among unaffordable luxuries. Other restrictions on children’s social participation include not being able to invite friends over for a meal or birthday party, not going on school outings or not being able to have friends or family over to stay.

Sometimes participation is restricted by non-economic barriers. During Social Justice Week 2010, many parishes and Catholic communities considered how people might feel ‘left out’ because of different cultural expressions of our faith. Sometimes looking at what we consider to be ‘normal’ helps us understand what we leave out.

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church explains that participation is expressed through the activities through which every citizen – either as an
individual or in association with others – contributes to the cultural, economic, political and social life of the community. ‘Every democracy must be participative. This means that the different subjects of civil community at every level must be informed, listened to and involved in the exercise of the carried out functions.’ (Compendium 189-190)

Participation includes the many different ways members of our human family contribute to the common good of all. It is not limited to paid employment. It includes valuing the work of caring for others, such as raising children, and the many ways that people build up their communities through their contributions to churches, marae, community organisations and other groups in society.

Question: Do I know what it feels like to be left out? What can I do to invite discouraged people ‘back into the game’?
Conclusion

God’s love... gives us the courage to continue seeking and working for the benefit of all...God gives us the strength to fight and to suffer for love of the common good.

Pope Benedict XVI: *Caritas in Veritate* #78, 2009

As New Zealanders enjoy participating in international sporting events like the Rugby World Cup – and other less public forms of sporting competition – we are also taking the time to ask if we can apply what we know of ‘fair play’ on the sportsfield to our lives as a community.

There is a theory or belief that if you create wealth at the top, it will ‘trickle-down’ to those at the bottom. Similarly, an argument often heard is that you ‘need to grow the cake’ before you can share it.

New Zealand’s recent economic history has not led to faith in these promises. More significantly, the Christian faith is based on a radically different approach. Christ came to preach to those ‘at the bottom’ of society. The Gospel account of the miracle of the loaves and fishes tells us that far from waiting for the cake to grow, we are asked first to share whatever we have. That way everyone has enough to eat.

Striving for the common good of all is a difficult and demanding task, but we do not have to depend on our own resources alone. Overcoming barriers between people and building a sense of being one human family is work that God asks us to do. But God also gives us the spirit and the love to undertake this work. God’s love...gives us the courage to continue seeking and working for the benefit of all...God gives us the strength to fight and to suffer for love of the common good.
Key principles of Catholic social teaching

**Human dignity**: Every single person is created in the image of God, and is invaluable and worthy of respect as a member of the human family. It is from our human dignity that all other rights and responsibilities flow.

**Respect for human life**: Human life at every stage is precious and therefore worthy of protection and respect.

**Human equality**: Equality of all people comes from their inherent human dignity. Differences in talents are part of God’s plan, but social, cultural and economic discrimination are not.

**Preferential protection for the poor and vulnerable**: Our Catholic tradition instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first. It is especially important that we look at public policy decisions in terms of how they affect the poor.

**Association**: The human person is not only sacred but also social. People achieve fulfilment by association with others – in families and other social institutions.

**Participation**: People have a right and duty to participate in society, seeking together the well being of all. Everyone has the right not to be shut out of participating in those institutions necessary for human fulfilment, such as work, education and political participation.

**Common Good**: The common good is about respecting the rights and responsibilities of all people. The individual does not have unfettered rights at the expense of others, but nor are individual rights to be subordinated to the needs of the group.

**Solidarity**: We are one human family. The principle of solidarity requires of us that we not concern ourselves solely with our own lives. Our responsibilities to each other call us to work globally for justice.

**Stewardship**: We have a responsibility to care for the gifts that God has given us, including the environment, our personal talents and other resources.

**Universal destination of goods**: The earth and all it produces are intended for every person. Private ownership is acceptable, but there is also a responsibility to ensure all have enough to live in dignity.

**Subsidiarity**: No higher level of organisation should perform any function that can best be handled at a lower level by those who are closer to the issues or problems, such as families or communities.